THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) A number of steps have been taken to promote exports which include reduction in transaction cost through decentralisation and simplification of procedures and some sector specific measures such as extension of zero duty EPCG scheme to textile sector and certain sub sectors of chemicals, exemption from additional customs duty under zero duty EPCG scheme for marine and software sector, rationalisation of EOU/EPZ scheme and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, identification of thrust sectors and focus regions. Most of the steps have already become effective.

Privatisation of Tea Gardens

28. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government plan to revive all the five tea gardens of ailing public sector unit Tea Trading Corporation of India;

(b) whether Government have any plan to privatise these tea gardens; and

(c) if so, the details mereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) Tea Trading Corporation of India (TTCI), a wholly owned subsidiary of STC, is facing an acute financial crunch being a lose making company and has been unable to discharge its obligation. The total liability of the Company is estimated around Rs. 36 crores as on 31.1.1997.

TTCI management has filed a petition in the Calcutta High Court for liquidation of the company. The case is now pending in the Court.

Patenting of Vegetables

29. SHRI K.R. MALKANI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that "Karela", "Jamun and Brinjal" have been patented in USA (vide the Times of India dt. 15.7.99);

(b) what other natural Indian products have been patented by foreign countries; and

(c) what steps Government have taken to stops this misappropriation of the natural wealth of India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (DR. RAMAN): (a) A patent has been granted by the United states Patent and Trade Marks Office vide patent No. 5,900,240 dated 4th May, 1999 regarding herbal compositions and their use a hypoglycemic agents.

(b) and (c) No, such information is maintained by the Government.

Patents are granted by respective Governments under their patent laws. Whenever information is received about the patents being taken on certain products which are not considered patentable, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of patent can be challenged.

Majority stake of US firms in Indian Joint Ventures

30. SHRI K.R. MALKANI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that U.S. firms are steadily acquiring majority stake in Indian Joint Ventures (vide Hindustan Times, dated 27th October, 1999);

(b) if so, a list of such ventures; and

(c) whether this does not amount to an erosion of our economic sovereignty?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (DR. RAMAN): (a) to (c) Sir, the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) has approved a total of 15382 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) proposals in the post policy period i.e. from August, 1991 till July, 1999. Against this, the US firms have acquired majority stake only in about 142 Indian joint Ventures. The details of FDI proposals approved including proposals for acquisition of majority stake by US firms in Indian ventures are incorporated, from time to time, in Monthly SIA newsletters brought out by Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, which are widely circulated including the Library of the House. The aforesaid acquisition of equity has taken place in conformity with the policy and guidelines for Foreign